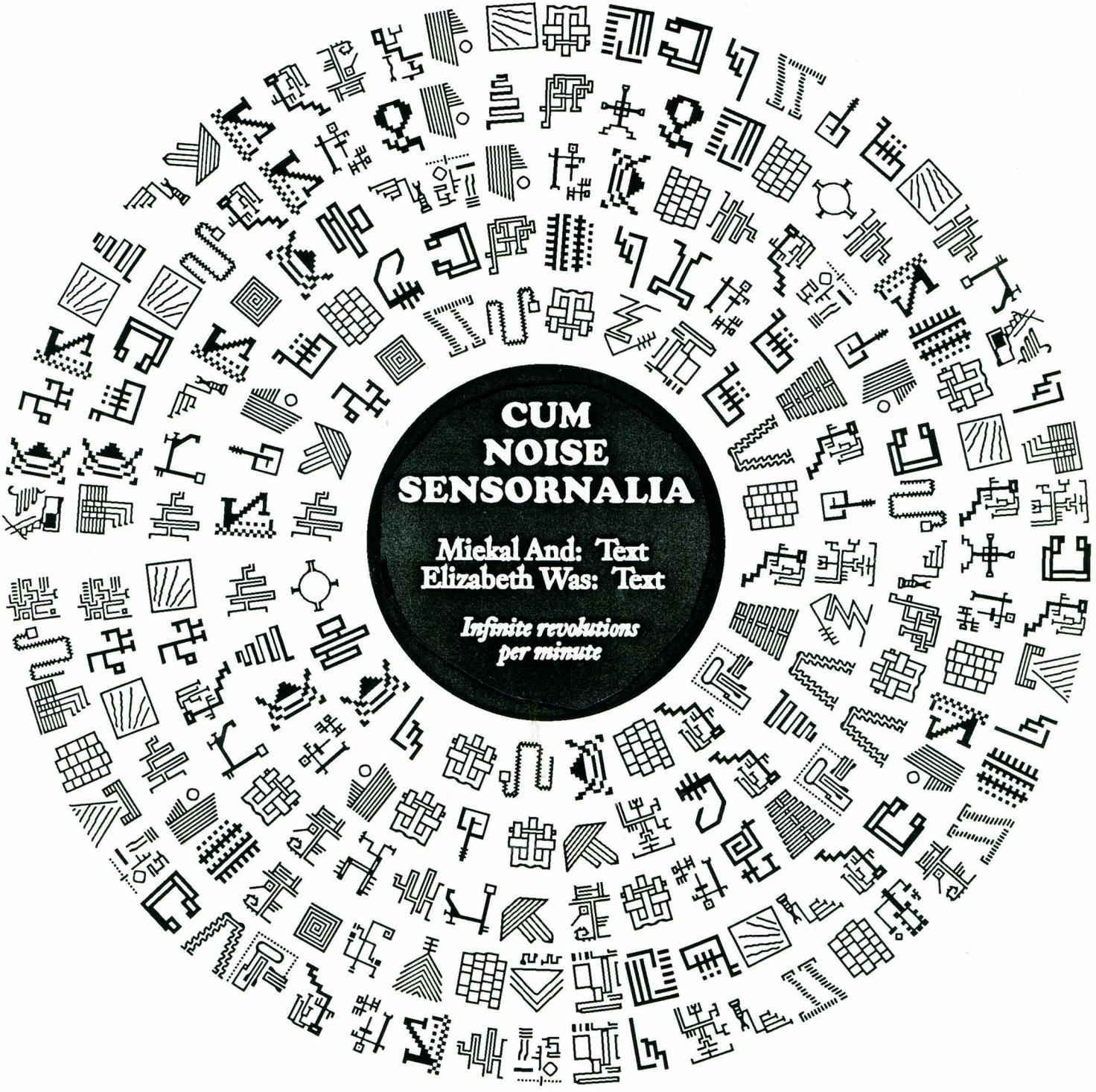
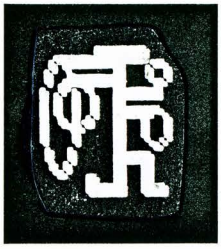

CUM
NOISE
SENSORNALIA
Miekal And: Text
Elizabeth Was: Text
Infinite revolutions
per minute

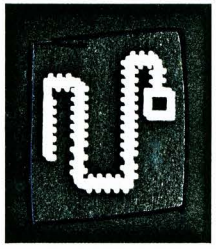
CUM KNOISE SENSORNALIA

Part One : ***Miekal And on Noise & Interaction***

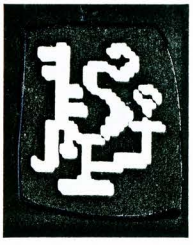


"Rather than working from choices I work from asking questions, so that the composition is determined by the questions that are asked and you can quickly tell if your questions are radical. By radical I mean penetrating. If they are not radical, the answers aren't." -John Cage

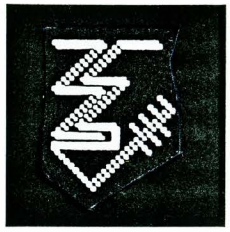
"Many people collect music that they like and surround themselves with it. I do the reverse: I don't keep music around me; I keep noise." -John Cage



Lately, I've been scheming of ways to get our knoise out in the open. All methods of audio distribution to date are comfortably distanced from those who might consume. You buy it, go home, get in the right mood, put it on to listen to, & if you dont like it you can turn it off or turn the volume down, & if you do like it you can wear it out. *The system of audio distribution is obsolete.* It is based upon ideas of economics & technology from the early part of the 20th Century when the potential of knoise as sound as music was reduced to the ideas of a few visionaries such as Luigi Russolo & Thaddeus Cahill (the inventor of the first synthesizer, a 200-ton roomsized construct of wires & parts first performed live over the telegraph wires.) Lets narrow our thinking to a more specific problem at hand, the dissemination of **knoise** in the post industrial information society, at a time when the technology for decentralized & self-reliant culture is cheaply acquired. The whole notion of recording to disk or tape a produkt which can then be marketed in the manner of any disposable consumer item may make sense for generic purveyors of taste, but when it comes to the **knoise** the world is changing into, there is no organic reason to look to the musical-industrial complex for models of conduct. To a small degree the 80s mailart / cassette / experimedia underground put a few ideas into practice, primarily artists contakting & trading directly with other artists. But even this is problematic in itself because of the tremendous tedium involved in recording, assembling, & mailing. Little time & energy is left over for being creative. (And we're not even on the art strike.) If we make a 180° shift in



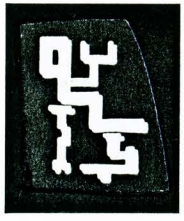
perspec-
& admit to our-
puters are here to
they will simply be an-
like the refrigerator or the
ory will be a utility that can be
knoise digitally (or making digital
its distribution effortless in compari-
implementation which seems most



tive
selves that com-
stay, & that very soon
other household utility
TV, in fact computer mem-
plugged into. By representing
knoise) several strategies make
son to present day methods. The
obvious is the use of computer bul-
letin boards. Uploading knoise to any board to which you have access is an easy first step. Replication (& control) is thereby placed in the hands of anonymous others. More to the point would be a home bulletin board on which could be stored digitized files of your life's work. This could be accessed 24 hours a day via modem by listeners, collaborators, radio & cable stations, etc. There is no consumer objekt to be exploited in this method, in fact it is the only way I can think of where recorded sound remains in its immaterial state. As it stands now, sound must be material-
a record or tape before it can be distributed. When knoise is converted
digital information it maintains its ethereality. A logical extension of this
online interactive hypermedia conferencing, where people in different lo-
make knoise together, their computers could run programs & sequences in
sounds could be collectively created & edited. **To think that tele-**

ized in the form of
from sound into
vision would be
cations could
parallel, samples &
communica-
has been used
tions has been available for a generation & what little it toward reproducing fringe culture.

Id like to take an opposite tact for a moment & think outloud of a few ideas (admittedly far-fetched but I think that if you fill the air with speculations & visions, it prepares the collective psyche for these possibilities to exist)....how to disseminate knoise beyond the reaches of a many-tentacled but often self contained fringe which still largely
mimics the large
materials & who
What can they do

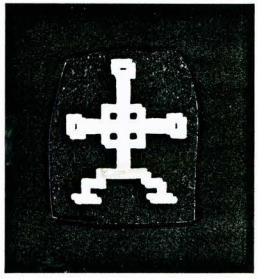


the speakers of
& drive around
speeding on
city plan-
t h e i r
the pri-
p e r-
music empire? There are people who make knoise with junk & found
adore the ambience of analog recordings but abhor computers.
to go public, to step out of the closet of the cassette network. **Take your car stereo & put them on the OUTSIDE of the car.** Turn it up
where there are lotsa people. Or think of the effect of a car
the freeway broadcasting the noises of activity. Have a hand in
ning & have speakers installed in public phone booths & make
phone numbers readily available. You could make knoise in
vacy of your home & have it broadcast to a homeless
son searching the phone for spare change. **Have knoise parks with auto-reverse cassette decks scattered around the park.** An endless flow of people popping some knoise in decks.

...decipher the navaho dictim "knowledge is power" one step further back: "knoise is knowledge"....

PRACTICAL INTERACTIVITY

In 89-90 we performed a piece called **EXPERIMEDIA STORAGE FACILITY** twice. The first time was at ArtCite, an alternative artist's space in Windsor, Ontario. The audience was to be involved, whether they wanted to or not. The piece began by leading them into a "processing" room where a "voice print" was made of each audience member speaking in a made-up language, then their hands were xeroxed as an ID & they were asked to choose from a list of possible inter-actions such as talking in the audience or playing with our son Liaizon (who was "in" the performance). An art professor attending the performance didn't even make it through this first phase, running out of the room yelling "this is childish" when I asked him to speak in his own tongue into the sony. The main part of the performance took place in a large hollow cavern of a room, 20 foot ceilings & lotsa space separating the audience from us. The bulk of our setup was electronic noise-making & sampling devices panned thru a four channel mixer (including the previously recorded tape of the audience speaking neologisms.) When an audience member heard their voice on tape they were to perform their interruptions. But besides slides projekted onto 3 of the walls & a little gourd-mask performance by Liz, Liaizon & Sophia, there wasn't much ACTION going on. This immediately made the audience impatient & agitated. Only one or two audience interacted when their voice came on tape. The majority sat there waiting for something/anything to happen. The irony is that they were waiting for themselves. Needless to say that audience left the performance alienated & disturbed. The next day when we went back to get our check, everyone in the office looked down at the floor while we were in the room.



The second time we performed the piece we did it at GENERATOR, a "small" music gallery in the lower east side of NYC. Since we really didn't expect anyone to show for it, we thought that the audience participation would be no problem in the space. Also since we had flown to NYC, our setup was minimal, the sony & our Mac. It turned out that 20 or 30 people showed, half of which could fit inside the space only if they were packed elbow to elbow. Because of the close proximity, it was nearly impossible to perform the piece as we had imagined previously. We resorted to sampling the audience speaking made-up language & the audience interacting with their samples. The sound in the room quickly generated to a cacaphonous & giddy outburst. The piece was foreshortened by Liaizon waking up to see 20 screaming, shouting, ranting & chanting people squeezed into a tiny room onto of him. Of course his reaction necessitated ending the piece.

Is the western world ready for knoise to replace music?

Yes & no & it has no choice.

(a query pondered by elizabeth was)

There was a time in the history of western music when certain pitches, certain intervals, were considered sacreligious & their use even punishable by law. Years later all possible intervals were allowable (using only notes of the tempered scale, of course) but harmony still reigned, & dictated when & where each interval or chord was proper. Eventually composers began to challenge these dictates of harmony, but it wasn't really until the advent of the blues that musicians began to bend pitches out of their tempered places. Nonetheless, this too was done within the confines ofa blues scale, ie,you couldn't bend just any note, ie, the blues scales are hardly microtonal.

From very early on in the history of music, proper methods & techniques were developed for musical instruments. An ideal sound or set of sounds existed for each instrument, the construction & design of the strument had this sound as its goal, & the player was to strive for this sound. For the most part experimentation in instrumental sound was for the inventor of musical instruments, not for the musician or composer.

When Luigi Russolo introduced his noise instruments to the public in the 1920s, he caused quite a rage, even though the composition & form of most of the pieces (many by his brother Antonio) were fairly conventional.

At that point, pure "musical" sound quality & harmony still reigned. Years later, after Spike Jones & his gang played plungers, car horns, toys, you name it, Jimi Hendrix played his guitar with his teeth, Janis Joplin screamed her vocal chords raw, synthesized & digitized sound are common, even turntable scratching, off-beats & somedegree of out-of-tuneness are acceptable. BUT, WESTERN HARMONY & RHYTHM STILL REIGN.

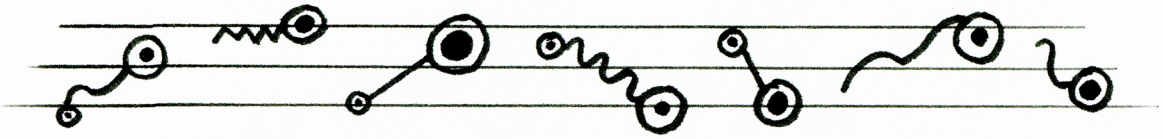
Establish a 4/4 beat, & you can do just about anything over it. You can even stop, start or otherwise interrupt that beat, but as long as you come back to it, it's ok. Play a I-IV-V progression & you can screech, shit, or play solo on a shampoo bottle, & sometime in the 1990's it will be considered acceptable by the general public. A great number of people who call their music experimental are experimenting with timbres, pitches, techniques, effects, but are still playing conventional music because they are not straying from the formats of western harmony or rhythm or the conventional song format.

Note how often I have been using terms like "proper," & "acceptable." NOISE IS A MORAL ISSUE. Until morality is shot to hell, noise will not be accepted. Propriety means "There is a time & a place for everything." Centuries ago, this was not true; many things were considered unacceptable period. Nowadays, especially in metropolitan areas, "Anything goes." But not anytime or anywhere. Noise is the oddity, the anomaly, that which is out of place.

NOISE IS NAUGHTY, SUBVERSIVE.

Obvious example of noise & its relation to morality: farting is acceptable in the privacy of one's own bathroom, but anywhere in public an audible fart is looked down upon by the average person.

It is only a matter of time when the intentional creation of extreme audio juxtapositions & excessive layering of sounds will be accepted too. But before that can happen the iron triad rule of harmony, 4/4 rhythm, & the tempered scale must be rusted away—& along with it, audio morality. (Note the radical changes in visual morality accomplished by the fashion world's adoption of modern art. Just about anything goes now, especially for women, especially in the cities, & even some moderately conservative clothes are made in fabrics which 30 years ago would've caused stares & frowns. But with sound, we are still in the middle ages, even kids, natural knoisicians, are still "meant to be seen & not heard".)



IMPROVISATION & KNOISE

Improvisation as the jazz world refers to it is not what I talk of here. Cecil Taylor, Anthony Braxton & others are an exception but then again the jazz world barely allows their inclusion. Improvisation in jazz has far too many restrictions to allow knoise to exist for more than a couple minutes per piece, or a couple pieces per album. Better to talk of the free improvisor, although this is a funny phrase since, as Cage & others have pointed out, there is really no such thing as completely free improvisation. We are all limited by our likes & dislikes, our reactions, our training, our physical capabilities, etc. Even free improvisation has become stylized in its own quirky way, & neither is it immune from unspoken do's & don'ts, (like DO make seamless transitions & DON'T get stuck in any grooves).

In places like certain lower east side basements in NYC in 1990, it can be considered very cool to improvise arhythmic, atonal knoise. In certain situations, the "noisy" one might be the person who opts to throw in a quick I-IV-V lick, or who dares to play a pretty chord. THE IDEAL KNOISICIAN EXCLUDES NOTHING. But the smart knoisician knows her place in musical history, & in her particular performance milieu. Meaning she understands the limits of propriety in a given situation & is willing & able to break through those limits.

Whether or not she chooses to exploit it, the world of knoise is the home of the free improvisor. The gamut of sound sources for the knoisician is even larger than the number of material objects (including musical instruments) surrounding her, for it includes all combinations of those objects banging, rubbing, bowing (etc.), in effect playing each other. The methods & techniques for utilizing these objects in the name of knoise are also innumerable, including not only traditional instrumental & compositional techniques but also the things which are not allowed by tradition. **Thus the knoisician has the advantage of having at her disposal all the rules as well as all the taboos.**

AN EARFUL OF KNOISE

An unpredjudiced ear can behave like glue in the perceiving of knoise. Like the zen mind, undistracted by distaste or confusion, it can hear a variegated, dense or chaotic mass as one coherent whole. Thus the perceptive but unperturbed listener of knoise experiences the same frenzied calm as that of the knoisician playing. In fact, besides the obvious physical difference between playing & listening, I consider the knoise-listener (the knoisee?) to be a knoisician as well. (By knoisee I refer to those who make it a point to listen to knoise & who in some manner or other enjoy or need it.)

We must be crazy, or sick, most people think of those of us who love knoise. No, but we further our own evolution by seeking out that which intitially disturbs us. And what this adaptation consists of is THE OPENING OF OUR EARS. A marvelous thing, but you can't open your ears if your mind is closed.

Less obvious: singing out loud in a clothing store. This sort of activity is generally looked down upon as unnecessary noise. Here's one from our performance past: One of the very first performances Miekal & I did together involved the constructing of a wooden frame pyramid. We began our hammering & sawing in an empty public plaza in front of a state office building. Just a block away jackhammers were tearing up a parking ramp; we could barely hear ourselves talk. And yet the police showed up to usher us away for disturbing the peace & gathering without a permit. It was obvious: jackhammers at work make a proper form of noise, hammering for art without a permit is improper.

Which just goes to show that it is not noise per se which is unacceptable; it is the time, place & intention of the noisemaking which are in question.

The 4/4 repeating & regular rhythm — THE GROOVE — holds the greatest dictatorship over western music, & when it goes, possibly the reign of GOOD-TIME FEELING and COOL will also be crumbled. These affects have always stood in the way of noise & experimentation. Even with a variety of offbeats, 4/4 always provides an even-numbered, square bottom. The old heart-beat argument, that 4/4 is most natural to our bodies, is invalid: research shows that healthy heartbeats are slightly irregular & rarely "perfect". In certain parts of the world, children grow up with 5/4 rhythms from the cradle, & this becomes quite natural to them. Meters like 3/4 & 5/4, as any really creative dancer can tell you, make the body move in circles & figure eights. It feels different, but when you get used to it, it feels as natural as 4/4. But who says you need meter at all? Listen to kids sing or play with word-sounds; listen to machines, rain, or cars going by. RHTYHM PRECEDES MEASURE & NUMBER.

Groove & melody are tools of the entertainment industry, & you find them right alongside sexy women, ego-slick males & the world of money. A pretty, predictable melody or a recognizable groove: both provide instant gratification. A myriad of human emotions is excluded from popular & even much alternative music. Thrash/punk is just as limited as country music: each taps & stems from a single type of emotion.

With **knoise**, confusion exists side by side with cool; romantic melodies might be layered over angry banging. Frenzy rides over a soothing long-tone. And this represents the world as it is. A jumble of emotions exists all around us, (especially in the city), & also within us. Nature itself offers the greatest display of diversity, contradiction, & juxtaposition. Why shouldn't music embody this? "Music" as we know it is obsolete; it needs to be replaced by something more akin to the sounds of the city & the sounds of nature's chaos: **KNOISE.**

"...it has no choice."

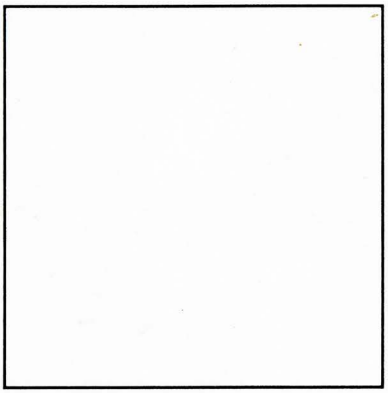
Even if intentional audio noise continues to be resisted, even outlawed, the reality of (unintentional) noise will remain. When the population explodes to the point where no radio can blare alone, noise is inevitable. On a street corner in your average city, juxtaposition & rich layering of sounds can be heard. Regardless of whether it is pleased or annoyed, the fact is THE MODERN EAR HAS ALREADY GROWN ACCUSTOMED TO THIS AUDIO TAPESTRY, and must learn to deal with more & more sound in the future. Our species will not only adapt to but eventually feed off AURAL GLUT. "Knoise is the most neglected resource in our society today." [Amendant Hardiker, *Polynoise,* Xexoxial Editions/Retrofuturism, 1989]

TO COMPOSE OR NOT TO COMPOSE

The meditative frenzy of a composer in the midst of a breakthrough, capturing her ear-vision & translating it into notation, is a state the free improvisor is familiar with. When the music/knoise "clicks," & there is no question about what sound is needed where. The knoisician simply (k)nows. She is a spontaneous composer with several advantages over other kinds of composers. The translation goes directly into the hands & out into air, with no paper, pen, or computer as intermediary. The performer who reads or has memorized a composed piece has to put in hours & hours of practice before she can begin to "get inside" the music. This is true of any kind of music, but to be able to embody the intensity of the piece & simultaneously find the composure to remember & exectue the piece is especially difficult with written knoise. Add to this the fact that much knoise involves irregularity of all kinds, polytonality, polyrhythms, changing meters, untraditional & even uncomfortable playing techniques, & I always wonder, Why didn't the composer just write structures for improvising this music?

TIME

In the time it might take me to compose, a 20-minute knoise trio, find players, teach it to them, & have them practice it till is inside them like it is inside me, I could improvise 50 different "spontaneous compositions", practice the saxaphone, make 15 field recordings, sample, edit & store sounds on our Mac, play with my son, make dinner & lunch, carve a gourd & go swimming. Time, this is another reason why I improvise. Improvisation fuels & accomodates the diversity of a polyartist's life.



TO COMPOSE OR TO EAT

Anthony Braxton can compose intricate knoise, notate it, his fantastic ensemble play it beautifully with all the intensity & emotion of an improvised piece, etc. But did you know that Anthony Braxton eats at McDonald's almost every day? This is no joke; he's busy composing & practicing & rehearsing. We all have choices & sacrifices to make; I prefer to be an improvising polyartist. I prefer a vegetable stir fry wokked with garlic, ginger & slivered almonds. And the sound of the frying is knoise to my ears.

ZEN MIND, BEGINNER'S MUSIC

The singlemost outstanding image that television left me from my childhood is a commercial for Colt45 beer, wherein a man sits calmly at a table in the woods drinking his beer while all around him trees are crashing to the ground. As I see it now, the knoisician is that man. And his beer, that which he drinks in with pleasure while helping to brew it, is the knoise itself, the sound of the trees crashing, to which he might add a slurp, or a clink of glass.

• • • •